

**RAISING AWARENESS OF TEACHING OR
LEARNING VOCABULARY THROUGH LATIN
AND GREEK ROOTS AMONG ENGLISH
TEACHERS AND LEARNERS IN TURKEY¹**

**İngilizce Öğretmenleri ve Öğrencileri arasında Latince ve
Yunanca Kökler Aracılığıyla Kelime Öğrenimi veya Öğretiminin
Farkındalığını Arttırma**

Kenan AKARSLAN²

Abstract

Background: Vocabulary knowledge is the most daunting part of language learning as there are thousands of words to cope with before a learner. However, children do not have any fear of learning words and they learn their mother tongue without even thinking about it. The secret of children, in learning a language without even noticing, is a clue for huge amount of vocabulary learned or retained successfully.

Aim: The aim of this article is to raise awareness about the effectiveness of teaching or learning and retaining large number of vocabulary through Latin and Greek roots.

Method: A pre- and post-written interview with two open ended questions (What vocabulary learning strategies do you use? What vocabulary learning strategy do you prefer to use/Why?) were implemented to see whether the students were aware of their own vocabulary learning process. A 'Vocabulary Learning Strategies' (VLSs) questionnaire was used in the study to see students' VLS preferences and their attitude to Latin/Greek word roots instruction or learning. Finally, a mini-syllabus was developed and utilized by the author of this article throughout the study whose aim is to use and promote the inclusion of Latin/Greek roots instruction in classrooms to help teach, learn, retain and recall new words.

Results and Conclusions: English preparatory year students at School of Foreign Languages in Adana Science and Technology University have developed a positive attitude towards learning words with roots, which is a strategy that has been neglected. The results of this study are parallel to previous studies alike in the field. Therefore, the opportunity to guess, retain and gain the power to control the meaning of English words with the use of roots and affixes should be grasped.

Key Words: Latin/Greek roots, vocabulary learning strategies, affix.

Özet

Arka plan: Öğrencilerin önünde başa çıkmaları gereken binlerce kelime olduğu için kelime bilgisi dil öğrenmenin en göz korkutan yönüdür. Ancak, çocukların kelime öğrenmek gibi bir korkusu yoktur ve ana dillerini, üzerinde hiç kafa yormadan öğrenebilirler. Çocukların daha farkında olmadan öğrenebilmelerindeki sır, çok sayıda başarılı kelime öğrenimi ve hafızada saklanması açısından ipucudur.

Amaç: Bu makalenin amacı, Latince ve Yunanca kökler aracılığıyla çok sayıda kelime öğretiminin/öğreniminin ve hafızaya yerleşiminin etkililiği hakkında farkındalığı arttırmaktır.

Yöntem: Öğrencilerin kendi öğrenme süreçlerinin farkında olup olmadıklarını görmek amacıyla içinde açık uçlu iki adet soru (Hangi kelime öğrenme stratejilerini kullanırsınız? Kelime öğrenme stratejilerinden hangisini tercih edersiniz/Neden?) bulunan yazılı bir ön ve bir son görüşme yapıldı. Ayrıca Öğrencilerin Kelime Öğrenme Stratejileri (KÖS) anketi, öğrencilerin KÖS tercihlerini ve Latince/Yunanca kelime kökleri

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² Instructor, Adana Science and Technology University, e-mail: kakarslan@adanabtu.edu.tr

aracılığıyla eğitim ve öğrenmeye karşı yaklaşımlarını görmek için uygulandı. Son olarak, yeni kelimelerin öğretimini, öğrenimini ve kalıcılığını desteklemek için Latince/Yunanca köklerin derslere dâhil edilmesini ve derslerde kullanımını teşvik etmek ve kullanmak amacıyla bu makalenin yazarı tarafından mini bir müfredat geliştirilip uygulandı.

Sonuç: Adana Bilim ve Teknoloji Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu hazırlık öğrencileri hep ihmal edilmiş bir strateji olan kökler aracılığıyla kelime öğrenimine karşı olumlu bir tavır geliştirmişlerdir. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, bu alanda yapılan diğer benzer çalışmalara paraleldir. Bu nedenle, kök ve eklerle İngilizce kelimelerin anlamını tahmin etme, onların akılda kalıcılığını sağlama ve kontrolü için güç kazanma fırsatı kaçırılmamalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Latince/Yunanca kökler, kelime öğrenme stratejileri, ekler.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language learners struggle with thousands of words in their learning process. Almost everyone would agree that a language learner needs a vast amount of lexical knowledge to master a language. Most of them would also admit that large vocabulary is a must and a priority. Learners adopt various Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) to ease their struggle. There are many VLSs among which an exclusive one needs special attention. The aim of this article is to raise awareness about the effectiveness of teaching or learning and retaining vocabulary through Latin and Greek roots, which is a strategy that seems to have been neglected by both learners and teachers of English in Turkey.

Why Learning Vocabulary:

Vocabulary knowledge is the most daunting part of language learning as there are thousands of words before a learner. According to Fiske (2006), there are many people who intend to improve their word knowledge. They get an alphabetical list of words and try to memorize them with only a small number who can proceed as far as “H”.

Learning vocabulary is also the most crucial part of language learning. “In teaching a foreign language, if grammar is the skeleton which keeps a human upright, then the vocabulary is like the muscles letting a person move on and around. Although dominating grammar is an important part of language learning, it is the word knowledge of a learner which boosts the movement of him/her.” (Akarslan, 2013).

Lexical knowledge is crucial, because your level of vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in your learning life, career or understanding of the world. Lewis (1979) puts forward the evidence of how the range of vocabulary affects “personal, professional, and intellectual growth.” :

“The Human Engineering Laboratory found that the *only* common characteristic of successful people in this country is an unusual grasp of the meanings of words. The Laboratory tested the vocabularies of thousands of people in all age groups and in all walks of life- and discovered that those people drawing down the highest salaries made the highest scores. Consider ... the director of the Laboratory ... : Why do large vocabularies characterize executives and possibly outstanding men and women in other fields? The final answer seems to be that words are the instruments by means of which men and women grasp the thoughts of others with which they do much of their thinking. They are tools of thought.”

Lewis (1979) also alleges that in various universities, groups of first year students, who were taught vocabulary specially to enlarge their vocabulary in experimental classes, achieved more in their second, third or fourth year than those students who received no special training and that if you have an extensive vocabulary, you have a better opportunity for success in your learning life, career, or improving your “intellectual potential”. Building up your vocabulary will “sharpen and enrich” your mind; widen your intellectual horizons; improve your ability to handle English and therefore thoughts; adopt a deep idea of the world and yourself in particular.

Is it difficult to learn words:

According to Lewis (1979) a ten-year-old child learns hundreds of new words every year. On the other hand, adults improve their word knowledge with twenty-five to fifty in a year. “Once- as a child- you were an expert, an accomplished virtuoso, at learning new words. Today, by comparison, you are a rank and stumbling amateur.”

Everybody acquires their mother tongue without even thinking about it. However, many people do not go through the smooth process during their L2 learning experience in their adulthood. They immerse themselves in dictionaries and coursebooks, keep vocabulary notebooks, try to watch films, soap operas or listen to English songs, but end up giving up the idea to learn English. What is the secret of us, as children, in learning a language without even noticing? According to Lewis (1979), the secret is the ‘simplicity’. We, in our childhood, kept learning everyday. We grasped every instance to get the answer to the question of WHY. The question aroused as a result of our ‘insatiable desire to know and understand’ or ‘powerful urge to learn’. Not knowing or getting the answer to the question of WHY is a source of ‘nuisance’ for a child. If you are a parent you must have had to answer loads of WHY questions from your children. However, an adult stops asking the question and ‘lack of learning’ is no longer a source of discomfort for him or her. If we revitalize this urge, we may succeed in leading learners of English to re-boot themselves for a fresh start.

WHY Latin and Greek Roots or Affixes:

Between 60% and 80% of English words are derived from Latin (Masciantonio, 1985). Booth (1980) suggested that 75% of English words can be attributed to “Latin/Greek” derivations. Recent studies indicate that Latin has a positive effect on vocabulary and other English language skills (Lafleur, 1985). Translating Latin and Greek words literally may not always yield results in all cases; however, we should grasp the opportunity to guess, retain and gain the power to control the meaning of English words with the use of roots and affixes.

Akarslan (2013) alleges that “a student who has acquired the ability to dissect a new word into its root and affixes will have developed his/her guessing power without first referring to a dictionary.”

According to Blachowicz C. & Cobb C.(2007), the following strategies are supported with the use of “separating words into morphemes in order to define words”:

“Recognizing the need to know,
Connecting to background knowledge,
Using context,
Using word structure,

Using references,
Using word relationships,
Using word origins,
Expanding word knowledge”.

“Separating morphemes” is of use in primary, elementary, middle and high schools as well as in reading and language arts, social studies and Math.

Is there any evidence that Latin and Greek Roots or Affixes support vocabulary learning?

Studies show that analysing words by dissecting words into word parts/roots/stems and awareness of word formation is useful not only in guessing or inferencing meanings but also supporting reading comprehension by providing the opportunity to learn, retain and recall the words. In her MA thesis, Karlhova (2009) concludes that teaching through Latin word parts is influential in a positive way and even after a brief period of instruction with only a limited number of word roots, students have shown an important level of low-frequency-academic-word development. She also argues that “student satisfaction in the instruction program shows that explicit teaching of Latin word parts is not only a beneficial, but also a welcome instrument for the university freshman class English language learners in acquiring the low-frequency words and academic vocabulary.”

Karlhova (2009) also cites Eğecioğlu (1996) who carried out a similar study with the junior class students of English language department at a public university in Turkey. Eğecioğlu (1996) concludes that teaching words parts to students learning English is an effective tool for learning vocabulary. She prepared a special reading and writing course integrating a semester-long word-part and three-hour-a-week instruction syllabus and found out that learners who know and utilise Greek and Latin word parts both remember and guess word meanings more accurately.

Bellomo (2005, 2009), carried out a study with university preparatory reading class students in America and found that participants showed an important progress after getting taught Latin word parts explicitly and they learned, retained and recalled easily the content words they came across in advanced reading texts. Bellomo puts forward the conclusion that “student feedback and empirical research both conveyed the viability of this strategy, which was robust enough to meet the needs of students from very diverse backgrounds—a diversity increasingly found within many of today’s higher education institutions.”

How should we teach vocabulary through roots?

Raising awareness of English Teachers

According to Orleans (1922) words can be categorized into three: First, those with word parts that are easy to see within the target word, and demonstrate a stable form (visually similar in target words) and second, those which include word parts that have “semantic transparency”. It means they are directly related to new meaning a word carries in it, or in Bellomo’s (2005-2009) words “clear parts-to-whole relationship with the primary meaning consistent in each of the target words”, and third, ubiquity (morphemes are to be found in a minimum of five words from the same family, not mere inflections or from derivations that change only the part of speech)”. To clarify further, it could be said that we should consider if the learner can see the root clearly, if s/he sees the relation between the root meaning and the target word meaning, and if the root is generative or in other words if it produces at least more than five related words.

It is important to consider the age and level of your students. Then, you should be able to select necessary word-parts and related words to be taught as well as the number of words to be taught at a time. Some roots are more generative than others. For instance, while the root GRAPH/GRAM (write) produces more than fifty words, the root AUD (sound, hear) produces about fifteen words.

Akarslan's Affixionary		Akarslan's Affixionary	
-19-		-1-	
GRAPH		*AUDI(O)*	
GRAM	: yaz, çiz, hat	*AUDI(T)*	: işit, ses, din(le)
agraphia	: kelime/yazı okuyamama, harf hatası	audiometri	: ses ölçü
allograph	: vekaleten atılan imza	audiology	: sesbilim
altigraph	: yükselti yazar (alet)	auditory	: 1. işitsel 2. dinleyici grubu
anemograph	: rüzgar ölçer, yel yazar	audiobook	: sesli kitap
angiography	: anjiyo, kalp-damar yazar	audiophile	: ses cihazları meraklısı
biography	: yaşam yazımı, biyografi	audible	: duyulabilir, işitilebilir
autograph	: el yazısıyla yazılmış, adını yazmak (imzalamak)	audience	: dinleyici
bibliography	: kitap dizini/listesi, kitapları liste halinde yazmak	audient	: duyan, işiten
geography	: yeryazı (dünya yüzeyinin an-	audile	: ses yoluyla kafasında kavramlar oluşmuş kimse

Roots AUD- and -GRAM/GRAPH- copied from "Akarslan's Affixionary", 2013

Bearing all these factors in mind, an instructor should, then, create and follow a customizable Latin/Greek roots and word teaching syllabus depending on the needs of learners. The instructor may allot a whole lesson for root instruction, or spare ten or fifteen minutes at the end of each lesson.

II. METHODOLOGY

A Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSs) questionnaire that was adapted from the questionnaire by Yazdi and Kafipour (2014) was used in the study to find out the rank of students' VLS preferences and their attitude to the Latin/Greek word roots instruction. Thirty english-preparatory year students at Adana Science and Technology University were randomly selected and asked to rank their top ten vocabulary learning strategies in this questionnaire.

Apart from the questionnaire, a written interview was administered. In the written interview both before and after the implementation of a mini-syllabus created by the writer of the article, students were asked to name the vocabulary learning strategies they used while learning new words. Two open ended questions were asked to see whether the students were aware of their own vocabulary learning process before the instruction of the mini-syllabus: 'What vocabulary learning strategies do you use? What vocabulary learning strategy do you prefer to use/Why?' These very same questions were asked to be answered again after the course in order to observe the change -if there is- in their attitudes. The mini-syllabus (see 'Table 1' below) designed for this study was implemented

for fifteen minutes at the end of each regular class. Students were, then, taught some words through Latin/Greek roots in English. Not only the roots but also some prefixes and suffixes were covered in these lessons. They were asked to guess the word and the connection or “story” behind these words by looking at the root. They were also made to keep affixionaries or to create root-webs as a strategy to record the words. The instructor of the course kept notes and diaries after each lesson.

Table 1. WORD ROOT/STEM TEACHING MINI-SYLLABUS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

WORD ROOT	Words Covered	Prefix-Affixes	Presentati on	Techniques/M aterials	Resource/s	Duratio n	Pronunci ation
WEEK 1 LESSON 1 AUD (İşit/ses/dinle)	Audio Audit Audition Pre-audit Auditorium	-ion pre- -ium (prewar/solariu m/diction)				15 min.	
WEEK 1 LESSON 2 CRED (inan/güven)	Credit Credible Incredible Creed Credulous	-ible in- -ous (visible/invisible /porous)	Stories behind the words Extra examples by Ss or Ts Words in context	Word-Webs / Ss Affixionaries or Notebooks Extra Photocopies Root Quizzes/Cross words/Matchin g/Multiple Choice Qs	Akarслан’s Affixionary, Instructor created materials (quizzes, multiple choice questions, worksheets)	15 min.	IPA transcription of new roots and related words
WEEK 1 LESSON 3 CAP- CIP- CEP (almak/kafa/baş)	Capable Capsize Capital Accept Anticipate	-ise/ize -al ac-/ad- anti-/ante- (ad+pend=appen d/ante-room/realise)				15 min.	

III. CONCLUSION

Discussion and Findings

The 17th item in the questionnaire presented in their first language was as follows: “I dissect words into affixes or roots (Latin-Greek)”. None of the students opted for the 17th item in any order out of 27 strategies. The result shows that they are not even aware of what this strategy is and what it promises to them. The students did not mention anything related to parsing roots among their vocabulary learning strategies in the pre-written interview. However, after the implementation of the mini-syllabus, almost all of the students put the 17th item in their top ten list of vocabulary learning strategies. Even after such short periods of instruction, the students showed great interest in this strategy.

In the post-written interview most of them asserted that this new strategy was very effective and that they were amazed by the connections between the words and that they should be taught through roots. They believe that even if they do not know a new word they encounter, they may have at least some idea about the possible meaning of a new word in their future learning. They also emphasize that they will be able to remember more easily the meaning of new words.

The observations of the instructor supports the view of students as well. It was observed that students adopted the new approach to word learning and created their own affixionaries and root webs. They were eager to search for more words to add to their lists of words. It was seen that they tended to see the word parts to find some clue about possible meanings of new words. They also displayed amazement at how some words were related to eachother.

As discussed in the introduction part, the secret of children acquiring their mother tongue lies in their “insatiable desire to know and understand” and the “simplicity” their approach to language. Simply asking “WHY” and continuing asking more and more questions. Dissecting words into parts promises to create “simplicity” of the language learners cope with both in quality and quantity. One root learned opens the pave for the quest for new words. Consequently, meaningful learning is fostered which, in return, promotes the motivation to learn. This strategy promises to “revitalize this urge to learn” – in Lewis’s (1979) terms.

Summary

Teaching and learning new words are significant in the acquisition of a language. However, learners find it very difficult to learn loads of new words. Although they are discouraged by this obstacle, many vocabulary learning strategies are employed by learners to improve their competency in learning, remembering, or guessing new words. Learning through roots is not, unfortunately, prioritized by learners as they are not aware of the effectiveness of learning, remembering, or guessing through roots. Teachers, on the other hand, utilize many vocabulary teaching strategies. If they appreciate and use this strategy as well, so will their students. Students will not be daunted by the obligation to memorize countless number of words when they are aware of the fact that words are interrelated systematically through roots and could be divided and assimilated more effectively.

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